

PRINTING

Getting something ink-ish going

ON A SNOWY Saturday last February, a few friends gathered at the Duke of Duckworth on McMurdo's Lane for a pint and a chat about starting a letterpress group in St. John's. Now, a snowy day in St. John's is not that rare, especially in February. A pint at the Duke of Duckworth is even less rare. A letterpress group, however, is quite another thing: that is a rare duck indeed, at least in Newfoundland. Yet, under the benign influence of artist Tara Bryan, a transplanted Texan, letterpress printing is experiencing a small resurgence on the Avalon Peninsula. So there we were, a few amateur printers, a book artist and a book collector or two, having dug out from the latest dump of snow, talking about the possibility of getting something ink-ish on the go.

High on our list of possible activities was a public celebration to foster interest in printing, and perhaps unearth other printers and print enthusiasts. We applied to the Newfoundland and Labrador Arts Council for funding, plotted and planned, and, from November 20 to 26, were delighted to hold the first of what we hope will be many wayzgooses: a week-long event with workshops, public talks, displays of artists' and fine press books and local printing, and a printers' fair.

Our special guest was George Walker, acclaimed wood engraver and proprietor (with Michelle Hogan-Walker) of Biting Dog Press. An associate professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design, where he teaches book arts, Walker is also a designer for Firefly Books. With his range of expertise, fine teaching skills and engagingly witty manner, he was a wonderful choice for our inaugural wayzgoose. During his visit, he gave a public lecture, participated in our printers' fair and led two workshops: a five-morning wood-engraving workshop, offered in conjunction with St. Michael's Print Shop; and a workshop on the basics of book design, offered in conjunction with the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador (WANL).

The wood-engraving workshop was one of the best, and best attended, St. Michael's has hosted; nearly a dozen emerging engravers, from varying backgrounds, took part. Expanding upon his excellent book *The Woodcut Artist's Handbook*, Walker gave clear and helpful step-by-step instruction as well as an entertaining introduction to the history of the art form and to the work of some of its finest practitioners. All the participants finished at least one engraving—most more—and

were eager to keep experimenting.

The book design workshop for writers was just as enjoyable. After giving a brief background on the history of book design and the basics of typography, Walker explained what both irks and elates book designers. He also offered helpful tips for writers preparing manuscripts for publishers or thinking about self-publishing. There was a lively back and forth between Walker and the 17 writers who braved an early Saturday morning start. Just how entertaining and helpful this talk was can be inferred from the actions of Libby Creelman, the executive director of WANL: before the workshop, she politely explained she'd have to slip out early to drive her son to work; a few minutes into the workshop, she did slip out—to phone her son and tell him he'd be walking to work. Creelman was quick to ask if Walker would be back next year, knowing that many writers who had missed this workshop might want a second chance to take it. There are murmurings about making St. John's a stop on Walker's tour promoting his book forthcoming from Porcupine's Quill in 2007, so perhaps those who missed out may yet have an opportunity to talk with him.

The Rooms, Newfoundland's new provincial art gallery/archives/museum, was the site of Walker's public lecture, "Re-inventing the Book, or Not!" This engaging and animated presentation moved through the history of book design, explained how new technologies are eroding our printed and ephemeral heritage, and showcased some of the new directions in design that book artists are pursuing.

The lectures and several related exhibits were open to the public, but the wayzgoose also included two events specifically for organizers and friends: a visit to the Basilica Museum and a goose dinner. The trip to the museum was delightful. Archivist Larry Dohey welcomed visitors with a brief history of the building and the collection, at whose heart is the library of Thomas Mullock, the first of the Irish bishops to come to Newfoundland in the 19th century. An avid book collector, Mullock had a beautiful building built to house his collection, which includes an edition of Erasmus published in 1524 and a rare 16th-century Calderone, as well as many fine volumes from the 17th and 18th centuries. We spent two enjoyable hours paging through books and remarking over unique bindings and inscriptions.

The dinner, held at Tara Bryan's house, was our last social evening with George Walker. A wayzgoose must have a goose, and George Jenner did a fine job cooking ours. Amanda Jernigan rose to the challenge on behalf of vegetarians attending and created a delicious tof-oose. Wonderful wine, delicious food and fine conversation (with a smidgen of dancing to

keep a few of us happy) marked the evening—and we were still able to get up in the morning in time for our printers' fair, the week's grand finale.

Held at the Masonic Temple in downtown St. John's, the fair included displays by local printers and book artists as well as work by publishers and printers from the mainland and England. Local fare was supplied by Daubers Press, walking bird press, Stone Cold Press, St. Michael's Print Shop, *Zeugma* 'zine, Marlene Creates and Running the Goat Books & BroadSides, along with book artists Anita Singh and Diana Dabinett. George Walker exhibited his wood engravings and books from Biting Dog Press. Barbarian Press (Mission, BC), Frog Hollow Press (Victoria, BC), Porcupine's Quill (Erin, ON), Gaspereau Press (Kentville, NS) and Anchorage Press (Jolicure, NB) sent books for display and sale, and Incline Press (Oldham, U.K.) sent some ephemera and brochures. Literature from the Alcuin Society, the Fine Press Book Association, the Canadian Bookbinders and Book Artists' Guild, the CODEX Foundation and the Bibliographic Society of Canada was also available. It was a great showing for our first such venture.

The afternoon included readings by writers connected to exhibiting presses: Kevin Major (who collaborates with walking bird press), Andy Jones and Mary-Lynn Bernard (who have published with Running the Goat), Amanda Jernigan (one half of Daubers Press) and George Murray (who recently published with Frog Hollow). Two small tabletop presses were set up for people who wanted a turn at printing. The aggravation that is parking in downtown St. John's kept some potential visitors away—we were up against the Santa Claus parade, which invariably causes traffic nightmares—but those who made it out were very enthusiastic about the event and marvelled at the many beautiful and interesting books for sale.



George Walker and wood-engraving workshop participant Judith Robertson discuss Judith's proof. (Photo credit: Ya-Ling Huang)



Amanda Jernigan shows off her tof-oose to enthusiastic and hungry friends. (Photo credit: Anne Major; kindness of George Walker)

Exhausted but exhilarated, we letterpress folks are taking a brief break. Next up is a collaboration with The Rooms and Grenfell College (Corner Brook) to have book artist Johanna Drucker give a talk in St. John's before she attends a book arts symposium being held in Corner Brook this March. Will we wayzgoose again? Absolutely. Response to this first attempt has been so overwhelmingly positive that we're aiming to host another goose in two years' time. We'd love to welcome printers and bibliophiles from away for the fun, so do, please, think eastwardly for the fall of 2008.

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